

Connally Bribe Trial Opens



JOHN B. CONNALLY
... milk fund case

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The Watergate Special Prosecution Force will begin attempting to convince a federal jury today that millionaire politician John B. Connally took \$10,000 in bribes while he was Secretary of the Treasury under President Nixon.

Forty-four prospective jurors survived an initial screening yesterday in U. S. District Court before Chief Judge George L. Hart Jr., and the final 18 jurors — including six alternates — from among that

group will be placed in the jury box this morning.

The preliminary jury screening moved swiftly yesterday as Assistant Watergate Special Prosecutor Frank Turkheimer and defense attorney Edward Bennett Williams asked the jurors in open court about their knowledge of the Connally case. Judge Hart then conducted more detailed questioning of the 75 prospective jurors in a closed jury room to whittle the panel down to 44.

The questioning of the jurors added little to previously

disclosed information about the charges against Connally, who took notes occasionally on a yellow legal pad as the jury selection process was under way.

The prosecutors, based on previous disclosures and yesterday's questions to the jury, apparently intend to base their case largely on the testimony of Texas lawyer Jake Jacobsen, who said he paid the money to Connally in 1971 in two installments of \$5,000 each for his support in recommend-

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ing a milk price support increase.

To bolster the testimony of that witness — who has pleaded guilty to bribing Connally in a controversial plea bargaining arrangement that was rejected by a federal judge in Texas — the prosecutors will be playing at least two, and possibly three, White House tapes in which the milk price support increase was discussed.

Other witnesses will include employee of the Madison Hotel and the American Security and Trust Co. branch across from the hotel 15th and M Streets NW, who reportedly will testify about transactions at the bank and discussions they had with Jacobsen at the hotel during the time he allegedly passed the money to Connally. The actual cash transactions allegedly occurred in the Treasury Secretary's office.

Defense attorney Williams

has said previously he has a basic defense to the charges against his client, Connally: "He didn't take the money for himself or anyone." Connally has said in testimony before the Senate Watergate committee that Jacobsen offered him \$10,000 at one point but that he refused the offer.

Connally, who said he has shed about 15 pounds since leaving Washington, had no comment on the trial yesterday. His wife, Nellie, and son, John, were with him in the courtroom as were several family friends, including New Dealer Thomas (Tommy the Cork) Corcoran, a Washington attorney.

Connally is the second former Cabinet officer in American history to be tried on bribery charges. The first was Interior Secretary Albert B. Fall, who was convicted in the Teapot Dome scandal of the 1920s.

However, Connally is the fourth former Nixon administration Cabinet member to face criminal charges. Former Attorney General John N. Mitchell was found guilty of perjury, obstruction of justice and conspiracy in the Watergate cover-up; former Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge of failing to testify accurately to a Senate committee at a hearing on his nomination; and former Commerce Secretary Maurice H. Stans pleaded guilty to five misdemeanor charges relating to campaign financing law violations.

A Watergate grand jury indicted Connally last July on five counts relating to the alleged bribe transaction, but

Judge Hart last fall ordered that Connally stand trial first on the two specific counts relating to the alleged cash transactions of \$5,000 each. The other counts of perjury and conspiracy concern an alleged plot by Jacobson and Connally to cover up the purported bribes, and could be tried later.

The separation of the counts was seen as a major victory for the Connally defense since it make a jury compromise on the clear cut money issue, unlikely at the time of verdict. The ruling by Hart is not expected to limit severely the presentation of evidence about the cover-up, according to informed legal sources, since it can still be introduced to show an alleged "consciousness of guilt" on Connally's part.

Connally, Secretary of the Navy under President Kennedy, was governor of Texas in November, 1963, and was injured by the same gunfire that killed Kennedy in Dallas.

He returned to Washington in 1970 to become Nixon's Treasury Secretary, resigning in May, 1972. He switched from Democrat to Republican a year later, and was mentioned prominently as a presidential contender in 1976 until his indictment on the bribery charges.

If convicted on the two counts of accepting illegal gratuities from the lawyer for the Associated Milk Producers, Inc., he could be sentenced to a maximum of four years in prison and fined up to \$20,000.

The jury will not be sequestered in the trial, which is expected to take approximately three weeks.

Before sending the prospective jurors home last night, Judge Hart admonished them sternly against reading, hearing or watching any news accounts of the trial.